

In the Matter of USA v. Michael Barzman, CR 23-169- MEMF

Your Honorable Judge Ewusi-Mensah Frimpong,

I have known Michael Barzman for over 25 years, almost my entire adult life. He has been a trusted friend and advisor throughout this time, from my youthful days as a struggling waiter up until now as I lead a celebrated restaurant group, Crew.

In spite of the significant physical and emotional challenges he has repeatedly endured due to his unfortunate medical condition, he has been a steadfast friend and supporter. He's also a genuinely, interesting, caring, and all around enjoyable human being.

When my late wife was battling Cancer, Michael went out of his way to assist in connecting us with care providers that might be able to assist. He provided unwavering emotional support and logistical assistance, all while dealing with his own significant challenges. I will forever be grateful for the support he extended to me and my family during that difficult time.

I was aware of Michael's financial struggles from 2010 to 2012, and I understood his constant worries about losing his health insurance and the potential spread of his cancer. I offered him words of support back then, but looking back, I wish I had done more. I now realize the extent of his challenges. Having experienced the loss of my wife to cancer, I can empathize with Michael's desperation and the poor choices he made. I was fortunate to be in a better financial position at that time, but I understand the overwhelming feeling of desperation that he faced.

Michael has confided in me about the deep remorse and embarrassment he feels for his actions. I am confident that he fully comprehends the magnitude of what he has done and that he will never again break the law. I testify that I will be there as an even greater support system in the future, ensuring that he remains steadfast in abiding by the law and providing assistance with any medical, emotional, or financial struggles he may encounter.

I implore you, Your Honor, to please consider leniency in Michael's sentencing. He has demonstrated genuine remorse and a clear understanding of the consequences of his actions. I firmly believe that with the appropriate support, he can reintegrate into society as a law-abiding citizen.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter.

My best,
Alex Pincus
CEO, Crew

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Your Honorable Judge Ewusi-Mensah Frimpong,

I first met Mike in Sherman Oaks little league when we were just 11 years old. Mike was an incredible athlete and one of the best players on our team. One day he invited me back to his house after a game. He lived very close to the Sherman Oaks little league field and we quickly became best friends. We shared interest in sports, skateboarding, riding bikes, fish tanks and art. For years we hung out nearly everyday. But that changed when we turned 13. Mike was suddenly diagnosed with cancer. I remember when he first told me the devastating news. I was terrified that I was going to lose my best friend. Shortly after that he went through an extremely complicated and painful surgery, removing his knee and most of his femur. The good news was they were able to get rid of the cancer. The bad news was he would never be the same again. His childhood was basically taken from him. He wouldn't be able to play sports ever again. No more skateboarding or bike riding or even running. And while me and the rest of our friends would still continue to do these normal childhood activities,. Mike was stuck in his room, hooked up to a machine that would slowly move his leg up and down; part of his physical therapy.

It would take months for him to heal, but eventually he was able to play outside again and we would start to play like kids again, as long as it wasn't too physical or strenuous. But just when things started to feel a little normal again, Mike's doctors informed him that he would have to have another surgery. At that age we were growing pretty fast. So every year or two Mike had to have another painful surgery to make sure his leg grew along with him. And every year or two Mike would be stuck inside his room for months, hooked up to the machine, trying to heal.

Your Honor, I'm writing this letter because Mike is still one of my closest friends. We are both 45 years old now, which means we've been friends for nearly 35 years. He's always supported me and been there for me, even in my darkest times. 15 years ago, I was struggling with addiction and It was Mike who I credit with getting me sober. He was the first person I called because I knew he was sober. I remember telling him I would only go to rehab if it was one of those fancy Malibu places. He laughed and said that if I truly wanted to stay sober, I needed to go to IMPACT. I did a little research and I was not thrilled with that idea, but I trusted him so I agreed. He made a phone call and a day later I checked myself in. It certainly was not a fancy Malibu rehab, but it was exactly what I needed. When I eventually left impact, I had no place to go. My family wasn't talking to me at the time and I burnt nearly every bridge, but Mike let me stay on his couch and he helped me find a place to live. He was and has always been a crucial part of my sobriety. I'm now married with two beautiful kids, I have an amazing career for

which I was just nominated for an Emmy, and I own a home walking distance to that same little league field where I first met Mike. None of it would have happened if Mike wasn't there for me during my darkest hour.

I first heard about what Mike did by reading it in The NY Times. He had never mentioned it to me. A decade had passed and my best friend never even told what he had done. I now know it was because he was ashamed. He was never proud or bragged about what he had done. My wife is a journalist and the first thing she asked when hearing about this story was "do you think he'd let me interview him" and just like all the other journalists that have reached out to him, his answer was no. I know he wants to put this in his past and do everything he can to amend his wrongs.

My career in the industry has afforded me the peace of mind that me and my family will always be taken care of when it comes to our health. I'm a union member and because of that I get free health insurance. But the recent changes to the entertainment industry have made me unsure on whether or not I will be able to continue to keep working and most importantly, keep my health insurance. I know that Mike has had this same fear for his entire life. For Mike, maintaining health insurance could mean life or death; and because he has a preexisting medical issue, it has always been a problem for him. I can't tell you why Mike committed this crime because I never even knew he had done it. But I can say that he was going through financial problems at the time and maintaining his health insurance has always been his biggest concern. But I can also say that he knows now that there's no excuse for his actions. He knows it was dumb. He made a mistake and he's prepared to do whatever he can to make it right.

Sincerely,

Kevin Blum

In the Matter of USA v. Michael Barzman, CR 23-169- MEMF

Cory Lashever
[REDACTED]

August 1, 2023

Your Honorable Judge Ewusi-Mensah Frimpong,

I am a long-time friend of Michael Barzman going back almost 15 years now and am writing to provide some background on who I know him to be. Michael is a kind and caring man - who has had more than his fair share of pain and struggles due to medical issues. I know he's dealt with an enormous amount of daily physical pain in his life and yet this hasn't stood in the way of him showing up for me as a friend in my times of need.

Over the course of our friendship, as I have dealt with some of my issues, Michael has made sure to take time from his schedule, come and see me, spend time, and make sure I knew I had him in my corner.

I do know that Michael was struggling financially back in 2010 through 2012 and was constantly worried about losing his health insurance and also concerned that his cancer could spread - this stress may have caused him to act out of desperation and do things that the person I know Michael to be wouldn't normally do.

In recent months Michael has expressed to me, in confidence, remorse, and regret over the actions that took place in his past. I know that the man before you today is not that same person - he has grown beyond that. I know that he has learned from the error of his ways and now an older and wiser person talks to others about how a reputable path of life is the only way to live. I concretely know that Michael has seen the error of his ways, I hope that you're able to keep that in mind as you adjudicate and be as lenient as possible at his sentencing.

Sincerely,
Cory Lashever



July 26, 2023

Kitchens for Good
[REDACTED]

In Matter of USA vs Michael Barzman, CR 23-169-MEMF

Your Honorable Judge Ewusi-Mensah Frimpong,

I am writing this letter to verify and confirm that Michael Barzman has been volunteering with Kitchens for Good at our resale kitchenware store, located at [REDACTED]. He is an integral part of the operation when he is here and an asset to the team. The mission of Kitchens for Good is to change lives and I feel that Mike is working that direction with himself. Mike is always welcome to volunteer here, especially if it helps him fulfill his court mandated commitment.

Kitchens for Good is a non-profit organization with the mission to break the cycles of food waste, poverty, and hunger through innovative programs in workforce training, healthy food production, and social enterprise. KFG operates community kitchens that provide culinary job training for unemployed populations, while simultaneously transforming cosmetically imperfect produce into nutritious meals for the hungry.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mary Scafidi".

Mary Scafidi
Operations Manager
[REDACTED]

August 5, 2023

Your Honorable Judge Ewusi-Mensah Frimpong,

I have known Michael Philip Barzman for almost 30 years. We grew up together in Los Angeles and hung out often. I moved away from Los Angeles 20 years ago to pursue my medical training, but Mike and I remained in touch over the years. We reconnected last year at a friend's funeral. Mike was in the middle of this case and was feeling ashamed and depressed over the events that had taken place. I was in the middle of a divorce. Neither of our situations were perfect, but our love for each other has surpassed all. In the last year, Mike moved to San Diego so that we could live in the same city and he has been my loving partner for a year now. I am so grateful to have Mike in my life. Even throughout the stress of this case, he has been the best partner I could ever ask for and a great support to me and my daughter. He is loyal and devoted. He is my rock.

Mike has always been there for me whenever I needed him even when we were just friends. I remember when I broke down on the side of the freeway one day. Mike dropped whatever he was doing to come rescue me when no one else would. He was the type of friend you could always depend on. The rare type that you hold on to.

Mike is one of the kindest people I know. His personal medical struggles with bone cancer (osteosarcoma) have made him more compassionate than most. He truly cares for the underprivileged and is always helping those in need. Just last week, he gave his only two sleeping bags (that we were going to use to go camping) to two homeless men on the street. He told me they needed them more than we did so he generously gifted them. He often buys or makes food for the homeless people in our area. These are the types of things he does on a daily basis because he really cares about people more than your typical person caught up in the daily grind. Suffice to say, he is empathetic for people who are struggling.

I am so proud of Mike and how he has worked so hard to get on the right path. He has been sober going to AA meetings almost daily. He volunteers at Kitchens for Good and sees a therapist to deal with his past trauma. I know that what happened over a decade ago was an act of desperation and not something he is proud of. Mike makes an honest living running estate sales and helping families who have lost their loved ones. He is one of the hardest working people I know.

I hope that I have conveyed to you that Michael Barzman is a trustworthy citizen, a loyal partner, and a kind human with a tremendous heart whom I am lucky enough to have in my life.

Sincerely,
Arisa Ortiz, MD
Associate Professor
UC San Diego Health

In the Matter of USA v. Michael Barzman, CR 23-169- MEMF

My name is Dr. John Faessel. I am Michael Barzman's AA Sponsor.

I am 87 years old, have been clean and sober for 41 years, and have been in the AA trenches working with new men since early in my sobriety. I have probably sponsored over 100 men during this period. I first met Michael at the Monday 7:00 pm La Jolla Beginners meeting. After seeing him again at other local meetings our relationship broadened and he asked me to be his AA sponsor. I sent him, via email, my first step assignment and made an appointment for him to come to my apartment and begin work on the first-step. I also know that he was and is attending outside service venues in the community. Outside of the meetings, since the inception of this relationship we have seen each other multiple times a week going over his 'step' assignments. He has also helped me a great deal with I.T.-related aspects of computer issues that I am struggling with.

We have spent a lot of time together including a candid discussion about his crime in 2012 and lying to FBI regarding his involvement. We spoke at length about his disastrous decision and how he came to rue what he did.

I am familiar with his medical condition that was discovered when he was 12-years old. He was diagnosed with osteosarcoma of the femur as a pre-teen, a severe bone-cancer that prior to the 1970s was treated by amputation. Luckily, Michael was treated at UCLA by one of the pioneers of the type of surgery to excise, treat, and replace almost the entire femur with a titanium prosthesis.

Because he was in the fast growth portion of his life, he underwent a continuum of surgeries over the years. I can only imagine the impact on a young boy's mental state which makes me shudder. Through the course of this long, extended, complicated, and massive treatment, Michael told me about how the pain was treated with the strongest opioids.

While all bets are off on who gets and stays sober and clean, in my opinion Michael sees clearly that he is an addict and has embraced the solution to this terrible malady in a comprehensive and profound way. I would say he is now "all in" with the program. He has numerous program friends and, importantly, has also undertaken service commitments both within and outside of the program to further cement his ties to his ongoing treatment.

In my opinion, Michael knows right from wrong. As I mentioned above, he has spoken openly on several occasions about the stupid decision he made to engage in the crime for which he faces sentencing. He told me that shortly after he produced and sold the paintings he recognized the horrible mistake he'd made. He said the torment went on for years, haunting him to the point of contemplating suicide, as he knew not only that it was illegal, but that it would be discovered and he would have a major price to pay because of it -- a very big price.

Such indeed has been the case.

Respectfully,
John Faessel

Your Honorable Judge Ewusi-Mensah Frimpong,

I am writing you to acknowledge and accept full responsibility for creating fraudulent artwork in 2012 and years later, lying to the FBI. My actions were wrong and caused anguish towards others involved from what I started. I am truly sorry for the bad choices I made and regret what I have done. I wish I could turn back time and not make these terrible decisions, but I know I have to face the consequences that come my way.

While I know this is not an excuse for my actions, my life was in a terrible place at the time I created these fake paintings. My medical situation had caused me PTSD and medical debt and bills had fueled a fear of me becoming homeless and financially broken. I made these bad decisions out of a place being scared and desperation. Looking back, this was no reason to act in a nefarious manner and I regret these poor decisions more than words can explain.

When I was approached by the FBI agents, I was living in a state of fear. I truly wish I never lied to the FBI. The only thing I can say is that I was scared and thought my life was over. Although my life felt like it was downwardly spiraling out of control, this was no excuse to be dishonest and I deeply regret my actions.

Since being charged with lying to the FBI, I have tried to better myself and right my wrongs. I have rejoined Alcoholics Anonymous and gotten a sponsor that has again been walking me through the 12 steps and have been working on my character defects. During the rainy season recently in San Diego, I began doing my own outreach program with the homeless population. I started accepting donations of rain coats, tents, warm coats and sleeping bags and distributed them to homeless people. Each time I gave out one of these items, I gave every person a warm meal and hug them and show that they are important. I started donating time to Kitchens for Good, a non profit organization in San Diego. As well, I re-enrolled in therapy classes with a counselor to address my issues that stem from having osteosarcoma bone cancer as a young child. I also began to reach out to young men and women selling fake name brand items at the local swap meet in San Diego and on social media apps. Without telling them the specifics of my case, I have explained to them that there are serious consequences for poor decisions and that there is time for them to stop selling fraudulent items and turn their lives around. I have had a few examples of young people saying that no one ever took the time to explain this to them. I believe I can educate people and make a positive impact on their lives. I am trying in every area of my life to better myself and help others.

I am learning a really hard lesson in humility because of all of the negative and judgmental comments that are now attached to me and my name as result of my actions. I have to be very careful on the internet because there have been so many stories and comments online about me some true others not but almost all bad, talking about me being dishonest and participating in fraud. But I accept that I have no one to blame for that other than me. It is a hard lesson but one that that the universe wants me to learn.

Thank you for your time your honor,
Michael Barzman